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Mark Szymanski
Pacific University

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The Ed Action Network: Working to Maintain Funding Levels

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The Ed Action Network: Working to Maintain Funding Levels

Posted on **April 1, 2004** by **Editor**



By **Mark Szymanski** <marks@pacificu.edu>

The Situation

As I was considering topics for this months column, I was recalled some statements colleagues of mine had made lamenting the freezing or decreasing of three important Department of Education grants:

1. The Educational Technology Block Grants
2. Community Technology Center Programs
3. Preparing Tomorrows Teachers to Use Technology Grants

I have written articles on a number of these grants in my previous columns. A good number of people have received these grants and created programs that benefited many kids in a cross section of our society. In the end, results benefited the kids. So it makes sense that a organization like the Ed Tech Action Network has been formed to support the restoration of these grants to prior funding levels.

As a result of the decrease in funding, a grassroots organization has been formed to organize and bring attention to the importance of continued support for these vital sources of funding. The Ed Tech Action Network is capitalizing on the power of the Internet to help organize and mobilize people for a cause. Even though Howard Dean eventually yelled his way out of the race for president, a lot of people listened to the lesson he taught about the power of using the internet to organize and mobilize large numbers of people behind a cause. In this case the cause of advocating for continued funding of educational technology initiatives. Some would argue that the support of innovation is crucial to our economic stability. Hence it should be a national priority. I tend to agree.

In their words “Through the Ed Tech Action Network, you can tell policymakers in Washington, and in your state capitols, that education technology is vital to fulfilling the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act and that ed tech programs merit federal funding.”

This call follows a realization by educators that mandates sent down by the Bush Administration’s No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) were not accompanied by commensurate funds. NCLB has created a wide range of new standards school’s need to achieve without the money to support them. “Unfunded mandate” has become a new phrase in education.

NCLB and the standards all require us to change in some way. While some changes call for increasing effort and efficiency, other changes call for developing new methods and products, and tools. In this day and age, we have been given the new tools-technology, and what most teachers call for is training and development.

The Site

The Ed Tech Action Network (1) is clear about its desire to become a direct line to Washington. To accomplish this the network promises people they will be able to:

- Have access a state-of-the-art grassroots website and online community.
- Receive regular federal legislative updates
- Participate in state network activities.
- Attend training and tutorial sessions.
- Establish effective communications with legislators and other key decision-makers.

In addition, by registering as a member of the Ed Tech Action Network you can also:

- Receive email alerts about important federal policy developments
- Participate in state network activities
- Attend training and tutorial sessions

When you become a member of the Ed Tech Action Network, you will receive periodic emails making you aware of critical issues being addressed in Washington. To help ensure that legislators are making decisions with information from their communities, you will be asked to return to the web site and send an email from the Action Center. The email will be pre-written for your convenience, although you can customize the message to ensure your viewpoint is conveyed accurately. It is essential that your elected officials hear from you.

The organization encourages you to meet with members of congress. They offer the tools so you will be able to: make and appointment, prepare for the meeting, stay on message, and take steps to continue the relationship after the meeting. It has the feel of a sales seminar at times, but there is a method that is most effective, and they are trying to emulate it.

Another valuable element of the site is the link legislation 101. It is a link that outlines the steps to how legislation is created. Starting with the referral to the appropriate committee, polishing the bill, floor debate and voting, referral after approval, conference committee which reconciles the differences between the two versions approved in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and finally the Presidential approval is outlined.

To improve your knowledge base, the organization also offers position papers designed to help members develop a deeper understanding of issues such as Copyright: Fair Use and Distance Learning and Wi-Fi.

The site is cosponsored by CoSN-The Consortium for Networking and ISTE-The International Society for Technology in Education. Despite their nonprofit status, both organizations have a stake in increased funding since the funding provides the vehicle for the development of the members.

The important message here is an acceptance for the way things are. We can continue to lament the increasing power of lobbying and advocacy groups on Congress and continue to see our funding dollars decrease, or we can be smart and begin to engage with Congress. Maybe it's not making a deal with the devil; it's learning how the system works. In the end it leads to more access to the decision makers who hopefully will make decisions that support innovation and our kids.

References:

(1) <http://www.edtechactionnetwork.org>

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